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View in the Ravine

"Why does a virtuous man take delight in landscapes? ...in a rustic retreat he may nourish his nature." Que XI. An Essay on Landscape Painting

Prospect Park is a five hundred and eighty six acre landscape garden opened in eighteen sixty seven in Brooklyn for three reasons. 1. To keep the land surrounding the city's drinking water pure from urban development. 2. Before it was a park, it was a battle field. 3. The hills created by the retreating glacier were perfect for panoramic views, from harbor to sea. It was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, who had also been responsible for Central Park a decade earlier

"The city grinds down its dwellers ... while on the other hand nature in its beauty and variety never palls upon the senses! Never fails to elicit our admiration; whether displaying its wild grandeur in the vast solitudes of the forest ... whether bursting the fast of winter, it opens its buds in springtime, or yielding to the chilling blasts it scatters its autumn leaves -- it conveys in all its phases and through all its changes no emotions which are not in harmony with the highest refinement of the soul." Egbert L. Viele, chief engineer of PP

A brilliant innovation in this park is the ridge of

heavily planted earth just inside the walls, that makes an effective screen blocking out the urban scene and permitting an instant illusion of being in the country.

"Prospect Park's arrowhead shape is more appropriate to a natural landscape garden than the elongated regular rectangle of Central Park, in which one is always conscious of the surrounding city" --Olmsted

There are footpaths that follow the tree-ridges. They are less crowded than the paved paths and lawn meadows. ~~It's~~ It's easy to feel lost in the trees and not many urban dwellers are comfortable with that feeling. But when you walk alone on a trail, you walk with countless others who have walked the same way. Together we maintain the paths and show each other the way.

The Rose Garden and the Vale of Cashmere are secluded ruins of an original vision. They are evidence of the lasting effects of losing a park's maintenance budget in the pockets of corrupt officials. As these features await renewed life, nature has stepped in as it always will. The plants grow unchecked, and attractive to wild creatures, like the birds the bird

watchers are watching.

Many of the plants are from here, many are not. The introduced plants were gifts from other places and can be easy to spot if there's a lot of them in one place. Intruders are not good neighbors. They take over because their neighbors haven't yet learned their ways.

The Ravine contains ~~one~~ hundred and fifty acres of forest and water. It is Brooklyn's only remaining old-growth forest. There are currently sixteen thousand one hundred and fifty five trees in the whole park. Together they store carbon in their bodies and soil, they intercept rainwater that would otherwise runoff the impermeable urban surface and cause flooding, and they provide habitat for the wildlife that was here before the urban surfaces. We breathe because of trees.

It is said that the loop's East Drive (the road with all the cyclists) follows a trail originally followed by the nomadic Lenape people, the first caretakers of this land before their forced removal. They moved when they exhausted the resources of an area to give the land a chance to recover.

"The only solid ground of resistance to the dangers of the piecemeal destruction of PP will be found to rest in the conviction that the park thro

ughout is a single work of art, and as such, subject to the primary law of every work of art, namely, that it shall be framed upon a single, noble motive, to which the design of all its parts, in some more or less subtle way, shall be confluent and helpful." --Olmsted

"The great feature of PP is its varied and well integrated landscape, and no segment of it should ever be isolated for tangential usage, or estranged by disuse, any more than a square canvas should be cut out or painted over in a great landscape painting." --Clay Lancaster, Prospect Park Handbook

Olmsted was inspired by the landscape painting of the Hudson River School. PP is a three dimensional interpretation of a two dimensional interpretation of the natural landscapes and wilderness of the Hudson River Valley.

This was presented on the occasion of the Pattern Foraging workshop in PP, Brooklyn. Cohosted by Xavier Snelgrove, Courtney Cassidy, and Zach Schlosser. Produced by Orbital Studies Magazine.

